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ABSTRACT

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 challenged school counselors to provide sex fair guidance and counseling practices. To determine Connecticut counselors' compliance with the law, and to examine factors affecting their compliance, 147 secondary school counselors completed surveys. The questionnaire was designed to examine counseling procedures, programs, and materials used with female students to determine counselors' factual knowledge and attitudes toward women and work, and to determine their attitudes toward the social, educational, and economic roles of women. The results indicated that the majority of counselors possessed above average knowledge of women in the current labor force and endorsed positive attitude statements regarding the roles of women, with females endorsing positive attitudes more often than their male colleagues. The most widely used career inventories and tests included the Kuder Interest Survey and the Strong Campbell Interest Inventory, which have been revised in an effort to reduce sex role stereotyping. However, almost half of the counselors had not reviewed their materials for indication of sex bias. The vast majority of counselors had not conducted any workshops aimed at reducing the negative impact of sex role stereotyping on female students. Nearly all the counselors, however, had employed techniques to attract opposite sex students to enroll in traditionally same sex classes, and consistently indicated the use of sex fair counseling practices in their daily interactions with female students. The findings indicate that counselors do understand the importance of sex fair practices; however, counselor educators may need to provide opportunities for counselors to develop the leadership skills necessary to become active agents for change. (JAC)

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SEX-FAIR COUNSELING PRACTICES: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

By

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1983

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The Educational Amendments of 1972 specified July 1978 as the deadline for counselors to comply with the mandates of Title IX. School counselors across the country were challenged to implement Section 86.36 of this law - the provision of sex-fair guidance and counseling practices. These guidelines prohibit counselors from channeling students into courses or careers based upon gender or stereotypical attitudes regarding traditional sex-selective roles. Title IX also required that all vocational, career, and attitude tests and materials be sex-fair. This means that materials used in career guidance should not contain stated or implied indications of sex-appropriate behaviors.

Literature has revealed that sexist behavior and attitudes may be ingrained, thus making the provision of sex-fair counseling practices difficult. Counselors may still be unaware of the many subtleties of sex-role conditioning and sexist practices in traditional counseling techniques and materials (Jeghelian, 1976). Little research has been conducted to determine if counselors' actual behaviors and practices are in compliance with the Title IX guidelines, or to determine if counselors are generally using sex-fair counseling practices, as suggested by the counseling profession.

In the Spring of 1979, eight months after the compliance date, research was conducted in the state of Con-

necticut to determine counselors' compliance with Title IX and to determine if counseling practices were significantly affected by: 1) counselor attitudes toward the social, educational, and economic roles of women; 2) counselors' factual knowledge base regarding women and work; and 3) appropriate demographic variables (i.e. age, sex, attendance at sex-equity workshops, student/counselor ratio, etc.).

SAMPLE

Participants in this study consisted of a random sampling of public, secondary school counselors in the state of Connecticut. At that time, there were 581 public, secondary school guidance counselors. From this population, 300 counselors were randomly selected for inclusion in this research, and the responses from 147 counselors were used in the final collection of data. The response rate of male and female counselors was equal to the ratio of male/female counselors employed at that time.

METHOD

All participants were mailed a questionnaire which was designed to: 1) examine counseling procedures, programs, and materials used with female students; 2) determine counselors' factual knowledge levels regarding women and work; and 3) determine attitudes toward the social, educational, and economic roles of women. The questionnaire was divided into four sections for the purpose of collecting this data.

The focus of this particular article is the results of Section II of the questionnaire - a description of counselors' reported procedures, programs, and materials used with female students. The results of the other three sections are summarized below.

Section I indicated the following demographic characteristics: the majority of counselors in this study - were between the ages of 30 and 49; had been employed as school counselors between 11 and 15 years; and worked at large high schools with average student/counselor ratios of 300:1. The majority of counselors had also attended one or more sex-equity workshops/courses aimed at reducing sex-biased counseling practices. Section III contained a 15-point quiz to determine counselors' factual knowledge base regarding women and work. The results of this section indicated that the majority of counselors possessed above average knowledge of women in the current labor force. Female counselors reported a higher level of knowledge than did male counselors. Section IV of the instrument consisted of a 35 statement attitude scale (Arnold, 1974) that indicated counselors' attitudes toward the social, educational, and economic roles of women. The majority of counselors consistently endorsed more positive attitude statements than negative statements regarding the roles of women. Female counselors endorsed items indicating positive atti-

tudes more often than did their male colleagues. Women in this study also more strongly endorsed items more often than did male counselors. Male counselors were found to indicate an ambivalency or an uncertainty about items more often than female counselors.

The respondents obtained a numerical score on each section of the questionnaire. Section II, indicating sex-fair counseling procedures, had a possible range of 0-30 points. Female counselors in this study obtained an average score of 21.53 and male counselors received an average score of 20.78. Section III, indicating counselors' knowledge base regarding women and work, had a possible range of 0-15. Female counselors obtained a mean score of 11.19 and the mean score of male counselors was 9.98. Section IV, the attitude scale, had a range of 0-175. Female counselors received an average score of 149.04 and the average male counselor's score was 139.21.

Statistical tests performed on the data revealed that a number of significant relationships did exist between variables in this study. Sex-fair/sex-affirmative counseling procedures were significantly affected by the respondents' knowledge base regarding women and work and by positive attitudes concerning the roles of women. As knowledge levels and attitude scores increased, so did the reported incidents of sex-fair/sex-affirmative counseling procedures. This means that counselors possessing an average or above average knowledge level of women and work, and high positive

attitude scores, were more likely to provide sex-fair counseling procedures with female students than counselors with little knowledge and low attitude scores.

Counselors' procedural scores were also significantly affected by attendance at sex-equity workshops/courses aimed at reducing biased behaviors/practices. These scores, however, were not significantly affected by years of experience, age, or sex, although the knowledge and attitude scores of women were significantly higher than the scores received by male counselors. In summary, the data demonstrated that counselors who possessed positive attitudes toward the roles of women, had an average or above average knowledge of today's labor market, and had attended at least one sex-equity workshop were more likely to provide a variety of sex-fair counseling activities with female students.

RESULTS

The focal point of this article, Section II of the research instrument, consisted of thirty questions designed to elicit information and descriptions of counselors' interactions with female students in relationship to the guidelines established by Title IX.

The first question in this section was an open-ended question designed to determine the names and types of career tests/inventories being used with female students. The counselors cited a range of 25 different tests, with the two

most commonly used tests being the Kuder Interest Surveys and the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory. The other two most popularly utilized tests were the Differential Aptitude Tests and the Self-Directed Search.

Counselors were then asked if they had reviewed their career materials for indications of stated or implied sex bias, and if so, what step(s) were taken to correct the biased materials. Sixty-one counselors (41.6%) had reviewed their materials, yet another 60 counselors (40.8%) had not. The remaining counselors indicated that this kind of a review was in progress. The counselors who had reviewed their materials reported that they usually replaced old materials and/or used verbal interpretations with students when using out-dated or biased materials.

Question 4 of the procedural section asked counselors if they had conducted workshops to increase the awareness of the negative impact of sex-role stereotyping on students' potentials and career exploration. The data revealed that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (83.7%) had not conducted any workshops of this nature. The next question involved the counselors' use of techniques aimed at increasing students' awareness levels of careers, particularly non-traditional areas for women. Eighty-three counselors reported positive activity in this area and named such techniques as bulletin board themes depicting women in non-traditional career areas, non-traditional female speakers, and films.

Counselors were then asked to indicate if they had reviewed all materials disseminated to students in an effort to determine if these materials were free from sex discriminatory language, including the use of the generic masculine pronoun "he" when referring to all students. In this study, almost one-half of the counselors (49.7%) had reviewed their materials and had made the necessary changes. Almost 20.0 percent of the respondents also indicated that they were in the process of reviewing these materials.

Title IX has also mandated that counselors must encourage opposite-sex students to enroll in traditionally same-sex classes. The federal government has identified these classes to be those with enrollments of 80.0 percent or more of same-sex students. Data from this study indicated that most secondary school counselors had taken affirmative steps to attract opposite-sex students into traditionally same-sex classes. The majority of the counselors stated that the action most regularly taken to attract opposite-sex students consisted of personal, verbal encouragement. Other actions were as follows: encouraged teachers to broaden subject matter; offered short exploratory classes in the practical arts; engaged non-traditional speakers; and presented sex-fair films.

The last part of the procedural section consisted of a Likert scale indicating the percentages of counselors who perceived themselves to be incorporating sex-fair counseling

procedures in their daily professional interactions with female students.

The first question in this section was: "Do you encourage female students to make academic, career, and personal decisions based upon individual talents, interests, and abilities?" All participants in this study perceived themselves as always encouraging female students to do this. All counselors in this research also felt that career counseling was always as important for female students as it was for male students. The majority of counselors also indicated that they were always aware when counseling female students that females have been socialized to avoid certain career roles, i.e. leadership, administration.

The fourth question, "Do you provide current information to female students about women's changing roles in society and the world of work?" generated a positive response from 118 counselors. This means that almost all counselors perceived themselves as always providing this information to students. The majority of counselors (58.5%) also indicated that they always instruct female students about their rights as provided by Title IX.

The respondents were then requested to determine how often they explored female students' reasons for the selection of traditional career goals. Almost three-fourths of the counselors indicated that they always perceived themselves as assisting female students understanding in this area.

Title IX also mandated that counselors make an effort to increase opposite-sex enrollment in classes with disproportionate numbers of same-sex students. The majority of counselors (105) indicated that they always encouraged female students to select non-traditional skill courses, i.e. auto mechanics, woodshop. The counselors were then requested to indicate if supportive counseling was regularly provided to female students enrolled in these courses. Slightly over one-half of the respondents (54.4%) indicated that they provided additional supportive services to these students on a regular basis.

The next question in this section was, "Do you explore marriage-career conflicts with female students?" Almost one-half of the respondents (45.6%) discussed this conflict occasionally with their students and another 18.4 percent of the counselors never approached this subject with their female counselees.

The final question in this section requested counselors to indicate how often they suggested books to female students highlighting the changing roles of women in society. The majority of counselors either never suggested books highlighting the current position of women in the labor force, or did so occasionally. Only 26.5 percent of Connecticut school counselors regularly provided this type of material to female students.

DISCUSSION

Research has questioned the counselor's ability to remain unbiased in the counseling process. It has been documented that the socialization process and the value system of counselors may actually hinder sex-fair approaches with female students (Hill & Hipple, 1973; Lesser, 1976; Schlossberg & Pietrofesa, 1973; and Donahue & Costar, 1977). Literature has also shown that counselors have made some progress in this area and appear to be providing sex-fair practices with their students (Hawley, 1975; Borgers, Hendrix, & Price, 1977; and Burlin & Pearson, 1978). Data from this study also indicated that counselors had incorporated a number of sex-fair techniques and practices in their daily professional interactions. Counselors in this study also did not perceive themselves to be limiting opportunities for female students.

Counselors in this study indicated that the most widely used career inventories and tests were the Kuder Interest Survey, the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory, the Differential Aptitude Tests, and the Self-Directed Search. The Kuder Interest Surveys and the SCII have both been revised in an effort to reduce sex-role stereotyping within the tests.

The data also revealed that almost one-half of the counselors had not reviewed their career materials for

indications of sex-bias. Literature has documented that a large percentage of career materials are biased and that companies have not made adequate steps to correct and to update materials (Birk, Tanney, and Cooper, 1979). It would appear from this data and other research that counselors may need to direct attention to the effective review and selection of non-biased career materials.

The vast majority of counselors in this study had not conducted workshops aimed at reducing the negative impact of sex-role stereotyping upon female students. Although this is not mandated by Title IX, the spirit of the law implies that counselors should be educating their communities in an effort to reduce sex-role stereotyping.

The counseling profession has urged school counselors to assume the change agent role in their settings and to promote sex-fair opportunities for students (Berry,1972; Bem and Bem, 1973; and Schlossberg, 1972). Data from this study indicated that counselors had not assumed this role to advocate for equal educational opportunities for students.

Studies have also indicated that female students themselves often limit their horizons due to a lack of experience, the socialization process, lack of awareness about the changing scope of women's roles in society, and pressures from parents and peers (Eyde, 1970; Woodcock & Herman, 1978). The counseling profession has urged counselors to continuously explore career choices with students

in order to avoid the unnecessary limitation of potential. Counselors in this study had utilized the following methods in an attempt to increase female students' levels of awareness regarding women and the world of work: films, non-traditional female speakers, and bulletin board themes depicting women in non-traditional career areas.

Almost one-half of the counselors had reviewed all their materials disseminated to students to be certain that these materials were free from the use of the generic masculine pronoun "he" when referring to all students. Nearly all the counselors had employed techniques to attract opposite sex students to enroll in traditionally same-sex classes. The majority of counselors in this study consistently indicated the use of sex-fair counseling practices in their daily interactions with female students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Data from Section II of the original instrument indicated that the majority of secondary school counselors perceived themselves to be employing sex-fair procedures with female students. It must be noted that the questionnaire was a self-reporting procedure and, therefore, open for interpretation. It did suggest, however, that counselors did understand the importance of sex-fair practices and appear to have attempted to incorporate Title IX guidelines, as well as suggestions from the counseling profession in their

daily interactions with students. The research also highlights the importance of workshop attendance and the knowledge to be gained from this environment. It also points to a possible direction for the future focus of such workshops.

Most of the counselors' sex-fair practices were being conducted on a personal, one-to-one basis. The counselors did not appear to have assumed the role of the change agent, as strongly urged by the profession and recent literature. Counselor educators may need to provide opportunities for counselors to develop the leadership skills necessary to become active agents for change. Nearly one-half of the counselors had not reviewed their materials for indications of sex bias. Research has documented that many existing career materials are biased. Counselors may actually be limiting career options for students by not providing updated information. Counselor educators may also need to be providing training opportunities in the area of career material review and selection of non-biased materials.

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